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Lebanon Still Holds Attractions for a Few Foreigners

By Nora Boustany
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BEIRUT—The numerous kidnappings of westerners last month have scared many away, but those who stay feel drawn by Lebanon's complexities and a desire to complete unfinished tasks.

Of 13 foreigners abducted by various underground groups this year, seven were released in the past 2½ weeks. But the kidnapping of 11 American, French, British and Dutch nationals in March alone triggered an exodus of diplomats, U.N. aid workers and journalists, usually the last people to abandon a country at war.

Claims of responsibility by at least a half dozen organizations from the shadowy Islamic Jihad to the Vengeance Party, the Revolu-

tionary Organization of Socialist Moslems, the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Factions, the Khaybar Brigades and others reflected a wave of concentrated intolerance, which made the usually hazardous streets of Beirut even more risky.

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"Eighty percent of our energy is spent on security," said a U.S. official still stationed in Beirut. "Half of the time I worry not about what to do but how to do it safely," he complained.

American diplomats are prohibited from traveling outside Christian areas, where they always move

with bodyguards and drivers. U.S. Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew makes rare but well-guarded trips to Moslem sectors.

"The western world is losing its window on what's going on here. You need a real presence and not only in east Beirut," commented one diplomat, who said that most of his Italian, French, British and American colleagues hardly venture out anymore.

"We should not shut ourselves off," said an American working in the health care sector.

The U.S. Embassy does not disclose any details beyond the global figure of 1,400 for all Americans left in Lebanon. Of those, at least 1,200 are emigrants who have returned to their native villages. Similarly, 90 percent of the 2,000 Canadian passport holders were originally Lebanese. The majority of the approximately 700 West Germans residing here are the wives of Lebanese nationals. It is next to impossible to get an accurate total for the shrinking foreign community.

A threat by a caller speaking on behalf of Islamic Jihad to purge Moslem areas of "spies" did not go unheeded. Assuming the profession of a journalist, merchant, industrialist, scientist and clergyman will from now on be of no avail to spies, he told a foreign news agency shortly after American journalist Terry Anderson, the bureau chief of The Associated Press, was seized by gunmen March 16.

Anderson was the sixth westerner to be seized after a March 12 U.N. Security Council vote on Israeli practices in south Lebanon. Washington vetoed the resolution and Britain abstained. Two Britons picked up by Shiite activists that week have been released. Of four French diplomatic staff abducted last month, two were freed. French Vice Consul Marcel Fontaine and protocol officer Marcel Carton are still being detained.

Danielle Perez, a secretary at the French Embassy, and British businessman Brian Levick and metallurgist Geoffrey Nash were told they were held by the Khaybar Brigades, although Islamic Jihad already had claimed responsibility for their disappearance.

Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the highest religious figure for Shiite Moslems in Lebanon after Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, appeared to have officially sealed the kidnapping season by denouncing such acts and warning that the removal of foreigners from west Beirut and Moslem areas only serves Israel. Fadlallah is believed to be the leader of the Hezbollah movement,

the Party of God, which groups Iranian-inspired fundamentalists that represent the most radical fringes of the Shiite community in Lebanon.

There are rumors in Shiite circles that most of the five Americans who have disappeared in Lebanon since last year and for whom Islamic Jihad has declared responsibility will be freed soon.